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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001392

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EB, NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [BA](#) [POL](#) [REGION](#) [ECTRD](#) [ROW](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN TO ADOPT FRIDAY-SATURDAY WEEKEND

REF: ABU DHABI 2045

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) The cabinet July 30 approved a measure to abandon Bahrain's official Thursday-Friday weekend in favor of a Friday-Saturday weekend beginning September 1. The endorsement came in response to demands raised by the Parliament and the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to boost effective working hours by 20 percent and unify government weekend days with the private-sector, which works Sunday through Thursday.

12. (U) A drive to change the official weekend had been considered since 1990, when the GOB introduced the Thursday-Friday weekend. Until then, Friday had been the only officially-recognized weekend day, though much of the private sector (financial institutions in particular) also closed on Saturdays. In October 2005, when a cabinet-sponsored survey of some 36 thousand government employees indicated by a narrow margin that most GOB workers favored Thursday-Friday, the measure to change the weekend was shelved. However, the cabinet's decision to pass the measure this year has met broad support for unifying the country's public and private sector weekends and for bringing Bahrain more in line with much of the rest of the world.

13. (U) In a press statement, the Economic Development Board (EDB) affirmed that the move will broaden Bahrain's relations with the rest of the world and would help attract foreign investment. EDB Chief Executive Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Al Khalifa added that the change would decrease losses incurred by the national economy due to the gap between Bahrain's weekends and those of many other countries. "Currently companies tend to lose four days out of the full week, which causes financial losses and (reduced) production rates."

14. (U) Calls to change the weekend had been resisted by local conservatives who feared the move would erode devotion to religious activities. However, Embassy contacts believe these concerns are unfounded and note that Friday will remain a weekend day, so there is no conflict with Friday prayers and sermons. Local businessmen have dismissed concerns that tourism from neighboring Saudi Arabia, which retains a Thursday-Friday weekend, would be affected.

15. (C) Comment: This is a long-awaited and prudent change. The August 1 implementation of the FTA is set to facilitate an increase in Bahrain's international trade. The country is also pursuing Free Trade Agreements with other countries, including India and the EU, which would see trade benefited by greater weekend synchronization. For a cabinet that was looking for cover against conservative detractors, the May 17 announcement (reftel) by the UAE that it will adjust its weekend to Friday-Saturday, in addition to fellow GCC member Qatar, was a welcome precedent. End Comment.

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